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MONUMENTS OF ENGLISH MUNICIPAL LIFE

BY THE LATE

W. CUNNINGHAM, D.D., F.B.A., F.S.A.

FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, ARCHDEACON OF ELY

EDITED BY

D. H. S. CRANAGE, LITT.D., F.S.A.

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PREFACE

I FEEL it to be an honour, as well as a duty, to fulfil a dying request of Dr. Cunningham that I should see this little book through the press. Some two years ago I had by his desire read through a draft of the work and made various suggestions about it. Several slight changes have been made in the MS., but it is printed substantially as the author left it. I am indebted to Mr. A. Rogers, of the Cambridge University Library, for verifying many of the references.

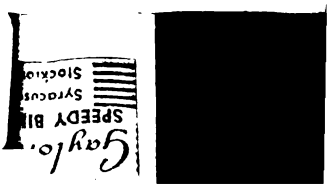
Dr. Cunningham's distinction as a historian is universally recognised, but his wide interest in archæology is not so well known. He once said to me that his great ambition in life was to be an F.S.A. This was, of course, said in joke, but his election to the Society of Antiquaries, on June 7th, 1917, was none the less gratifying to him as a recognition that, though not primarily an antiquary, he had endeavoured when writing

history to give full weight to archæological evidence.

The author's wide knowledge is well illustrated in this short book, which brings together in a valuable form much of the evidence still remaining of the growth of English towns and of the municipal buildings which attest it.

D. H. S. CRANAGE.

February, 1920.



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MONUMENTS OF ENGLISH MUNICIPAL LI

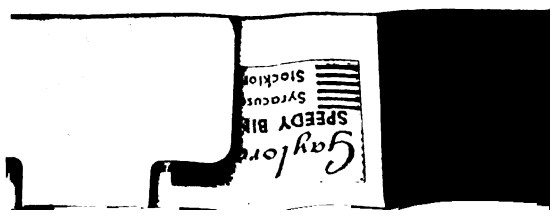
INTRODUCTION

1. THE STUDY OF MONUMENTS.—The disc and examination of ancient monuments has lutionised our knowledge of ancient history, has given us accurate information about the religion, and industrial conditions of the empires of the distant past, so that we ar longer forced to rely on the shadowy tradi which have been handed down to us. I ca but feel, however, that we should do well to r more systematic use than we are inclined t of the monuments in our own island, and seek for the light which we may get from t in regard to our own history. I may illus what I mean by reference to municipal hist and the attempts I have personally made du the last twenty years to draw on this sourc information.

We must certainly exercise considerable restraint in relying on these monuments

source of information. It is always desirable to take the archæological evidence in conjunction with literary history, and the more we can bring literary history to bear on the monuments the more we shall be sure that we are interpreting their evidence correctly.* Taken by itself, archæological evidence tells us very little. The Devil's Dyke, which runs for seven miles across Newmarket Heath, is an immense work which measures some thirty feet from the top of the dyke to the bottom of the ditch. There is no doubt that it is very ancient, and the English, when they settled, used it as a boundary. We have good reason to believe that it is pre-Roman, and we can conjecture that the people in the east of Britain constructed it to protect themselves or their cattle against raids from the west; but we really know nothing of the rulers who were able to organise the masses of labour required for the work and to feed them, nor of the tools that were used, nor of the occasion for this vast undertaking. The whole is shrouded in mystery. There may be much ingenious conjecture that has a high probability, but little of

* The use of literary evidence to correct the opinions of expert antiquaries is of frequent occurrence. The finials on the railings outside Great St. Mary's Church, Cambridge, are not examples of the best work of the fifteenth century; they were supplied to the churchwardens in 1851. The skulls found at the corner of Park Street and Jesus Lane in the same town were not those of ancient Britons or Romans or Danes, but, as the parochial registers of All Saints' showed, those of early Quakers.



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which we can be certain as a fact, and we should aim at using the monuments so as to obtain a more accurate knowledge of facts. That archæological evidence can do something to supplement what we gather from records becomes clear when we contrast the testimony that is given by monuments with that of literary history. Literary history tells us what people thought or wished others to think; monuments give us unimpeachable evidence as to human efforts, and let us see something that men did. Why or when they did it we may not know, but at least we cannot doubt that human effort was actually expended in this place. The accounts of a victory may be exaggerated, but the traces of a great battle sometimes remain for generations,* and an earthwork or a building tells of actual human endeavour. There is constant trouble in the effort to determine the relationship of any literary history or of many documents to actual life in the past. Was the Statute of Labourers an instrument that brought about the steady depression of the English peasantry, or was it little more than a dead letter? Are sumptuary laws evidence for the habits of the people or only for the intentions of rulers? These are matters on which literary evidence leaves us in constant doubt, but monuments tell us not of what people thought or intended, but of what

* W. H. Hall, *Roman Roads on the Riviera.*

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they did. They raise a definite question and set us searching the literary evidence for answers to the question as to when and why they did it. The most hasty observation of the monuments of the past gives us concrete illustrations which stimulate the imagination, and enable us to picture bygone conditions more vividly, helping to set some of the questions about which we are uncertain in a precise and definite form. Our attention is called to the conditions which are involved in the production of such works, and we are led to inquire as to the form in which such conditions were present at a given place and time.

2. Domesday Towns.—In order to group monumental evidence in regard to municipal life, we shall find it convenient to go back to the Norman Conquest, since there were numbers of towns which were noted as such in the great survey by William the Conqueror. It is true that our whole conception of a town* in the twentieth century is very different from that which was current in England during the centuries before the Industrial Revolution, and we need not endeavour to find a definition of a city or a town which will suit all ages alike; it will suffice for our purpose if we

* "The great industrial centres which are familiar enough in the present day are really of recent growth. In all probability the population of London was only about 40,000 or 50,000 from 1189 to 1599" (Dr. C. Creighton, *Blackwood's Magazine*, April, 1891).

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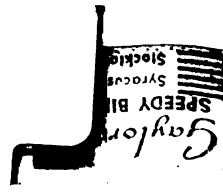
interpret "town" in a large sense, and include any place where a market was held or where we find a market house* or market cross, even if the market itself is forgotten. It is sufficient for our purpose to say that we have ample evidence that at the time when Domesday Book was completed there were populous places with an organised life for internal police and for military, fiscal, or commercial purposes. We have ample means of tracing the subsequent growth of many of these centres, since charters enable us to follow the constitutional history of one town or another and to specify the steps by which these towns became more completely self-governing, with possessions and powers of their own, with a policy of their own and definite responsibilities of their own to the Crown. But it is also instructive to take a retrospective glance from this era and to consider how far the monuments which remain may help us to understand the reasons for the choice of a particular site, or the nature of the original nucleus of a particular town, or the elements favourable to its growth.

* There are market houses at Fenstanton in Cambridgeshire, and Ewelme in Oxfordshire.

I.—THE ELEMENTS OF TOWN LIFE

1. Roman Towns.—Throughout a great part of England there remain permanent marks of the civilisation which the Romans established in Britain. The roads and waterways which served as means of communication, and the remains of villas which were centres of civilisation, are found all over the area of permanent occupation, and bear witness to the great work which the Romans achieved in developing the country; yet when we ask what influence they exercised on the life of the English people who immigrated to Britain after it had ceased to be part of the Empire, we are met by grave difficulties in attempting to distinguish mere relics from survivals of the former civilised life among the new people, and from revivals which were due to influence from abroad. Where we have satisfactory proof of the disuse of any Roman structure, we may regard it as a mere relic. Hadrian's Wall tells us of a great defensive system when the camps were occupied and the forts and watchtowers were manned, but this did not survive, for though there was need for defence against raids or occasional invasion



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from the north, all through the history of England till the seventeenth century the system of defence organised by the Howards and the Musgraves was quite unlike that of the Roman legions, and the Border, which the English defended, lay north of the Roman Wall and not along it. Since the Roman soldiers departed the remains of the Wall have been a mere relic. In other cases where the arts of life were prosecuted in England by men who were themselves familiar with Roman habits as they had survived in southern lands, it is not easy to distinguish the cases of survival on British soil from those of revival and reintroduction by Benedictine monks. The question would be simpler if we could be certain how far the conquest by the English was overwhelming and how far we may accept the account which is given by British authorities* and regard it as a gradual penetration. It is at least remarkable that the area which the Conqueror described in his great survey should correspond so closely with the area occupied by the Romans. Northumbria and Cumbria and Wales had not been settled by the Romans, and their resources are not enumerated in Domesday Book. After more than six intervening centuries the area of Roman occupation still lent itself to the application of a Roman method of estimating resources. It might be surmised that

* Flinders Petrie, *Tysilio.*

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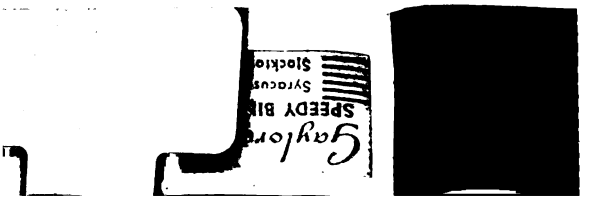
the towns which had been so important in Roman Britain were not likely to be utterly extinguished, and there are two features of Roman towns which reappear in the Middle Ages. The regulation of the weekly markets* was carried out in accordance with civil law, and the type of house which continued to be constructed was similar to that which had been adopted in Roman Britain.† But these similarities are not conclusive. The system of market regulation is easily accounted for as a later introduction, and the type of house does not seem to have been of Roman introduction, but one that the Romans themselves adopted. The question of continuous life from Roman times must be dealt with as one of the history of particular places. Freeman regarded Exeter‡ as the one town to which a continuous life can be ascribed with certainty, and there is some probability that Carlisle also lived through the storm, while it is likely that if there was not a survival of the great commercial and administrative centres at London and York there was at least a revival at a very early date. On the other hand, when there is evidence of a change of site, we may regard it as testifying to the disuse of the original site and think of Verulam as a mere quarry from which

* *Report on Fairs and Markets, Parl. Papers*, 1889, vol. xxxviii.

† Haverfield, Victoria County History: *Northamptonshire*.

‡ Freeman, *Exeter* (Historic Towns Series).



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the monks of St. Albans obtained materials for building the Abbey, which became the nucleus of a new town. The evidence which was primarily adduced of the disuse of the main lines of traffic in London has proved on further inquiry to be mistaken, and the claim of London to continuous existence is not to be lightly waived aside.

The importance of communication by water, especially for the conveyance of heavy goods, such as corn, wool, building materials, or fuel, was a feature which was common to medieval and modern times alike, and must be discounted when the influence of the earlier on the later municipal life is being discussed. There were physical reasons for the development of districts where water communication was possible, such as the valleys of the Don and the Trent, or the Thames and the Severn valleys, or Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, and East Anglia. The great Roman city of Silchester had no facilities for traffic by water, and it never revived after its desertion.

Some of the Roman towns were built on the sites of British settlements. This was the case at Colchester* and at Old Sarum and Wareham, where British fortifications still remain. But many of their towns were laid out originally as military camps, and left their mark on the subsequent development of the town by laying down the lines

* Cutts, *Colchester*, 23.

which it took as it grew in importance. This was the case at Winchester, at Leicester, and Cambridge. Roman Lincoln lay on the slope and stretched from the New Port, which is still the northern boundary of the town, while on the south it was in close proximity to the great system of waterways which spread out through the east of England.

2. Monastic Colonies.—The monastic colonies which had been established in different parts of England also contributed not a little to the growth of town life, and occasionally sheltered the beginnings of some particular town. The Benedictine houses were intended by St. Gregory the Great to be the bases from which a spiritual regeneration might be brought to bear and maintained, and they absolutely discarded the individualism which has been such a potent factor in economic progress in modern times. Incidentally they aimed at the material welfare of the religious community itself in the future, and the monks were under the obligation to devote themselves to labour. The functions both of labour and of capital were discharged.

The influence of this communal economic organisation was enormous in all parts of Europe, both in the reclaiming of land and in the promotion of tillage. The monks were not only engaged in labour themselves, but they organised the work

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of their dependents.* The monasteries gradually became great centres of industry, especially in connection with the building and furnishing of the abbey church,† and as they attracted an increased population they not only offered a market for regular supplies, but endeavoured to organise distant trade, at all events occasionally.‡ A monastic colony, with the economic life which spread under its fostering care, has been the main element in the growth of such towns as Peterborough, Glastonbury,§ and St. Albans, and has been an important subsidiary factor in many other cases.

Monastic foundations were the nucleus of some of the new towns which grew up in Scotland under the influence of Queen Margaret and King David. The struggles in the thirteenth century between the monks and the townsmen who aimed at obtaining the privilege of self-government and being free from monastic interference were of frequent occurrence, and appear to have been specially bitter at Norwich‖ and at Reading.¶ It is signi-

* Compare *Northamptonshire*, Victoria County History, vol. ii., for the regular staff at Peterborough.

† Compare the rebuilding of Canterbury after the fire.

‡ Continental analogies show the importance of monastic activity in organising industry (*e.g.*, S. Denys—Doublet, *S. Denys*, 187).

§ The tribunal or office where civic affairs were administered still exists.

‖ Blomefield, iii. 53.

¶ Coates, *Reading*, 49.

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ficant that in several cases, such as Bury St. Edmunds, there was no wall to protect the town itself, but only an abbey wall to defend the monks in their seclusion.

The monasteries provided for the worship and Christian burial of the brethren, and to some extent for their dependents; this was frequently done by the provision of one or more parish churches and churchyards apart from the abbey, as St. Mary's at Ely. In other cases the townsmen buried their dead each in his own land, and the places which were thus consecrated by the burial of the dead became the sites of chapels and churches and eventually of separate churches. In the older towns, as York, Lincoln, or London, which grew up before the conversion of England had led to the general introduction of provision for Christian burial in parish churchyards, there are great numbers of separate parishes.*

3. MILITARY REQUIREMENTS.—Military requirements also led to the foundation of many towns, and we may look back to the Danish invasions as the occasion of the founding of many forts in the Midlands by Edward the Elder and the Lady of the Mercians, such as Tamworth and Warwick.

* Selden (*Tithes*, 255) expresses the opinion that there was no organisation of parishes in England before A.D. 700. At Much Wenlock a Vicar in the sixteenth century refused to consent to the consecration of separate churchyards for the outlying chapels (Cranage, *Corporate Responsibility*, 13, 14).

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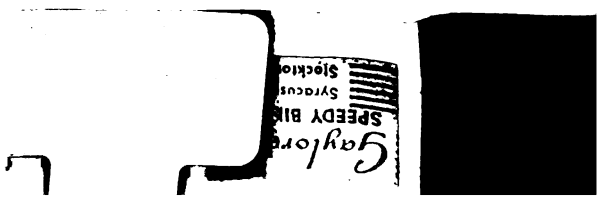
There are also permanent settlements of the invaders in the burghs of Lincoln, Derby, Leicester, and Cambridge. They seem to have been absorbed in the monarchy of Cnut and not to have remained hostile, but they gave early signs of independent self-government in the *lage-manni*. The motte, with a wooden castle, was the origin of town life in many cases, as at Thetford, and the market was established for the supplies of the soldiers and their dependents, as at Castle Acre. Professor Maitland has shown the extreme importance of this military element in the enumeration of burghs in Domesday Book; but the building of new castles and the maintenance of an army of occupation continued all through the Norman and Angevin period, and organisation for defensive purposes was specially needed on the Borders of Scotland and Wales. The centres from which the Bishops of Durham and the Earls of Chester and Shrewsbury exercised jurisdiction were the very bulwarks of the English realm.

4. Cohesion of Groups.—When we have thus distinguished various elements in town life, we can note that there are some towns where there was no known social nucleus. The sites of Great Yarmouth* and of St. Ives were so suitable for trade as to be the scenes first of a fair and afterwards of a permanent settlement. In some only

* Blomefield, *Norfolk*, xi. 297.

one of these influences appears to have been present, while others were less simple in character, and arose from the cohesion of two or more distinct groups. At Peterborough there was an abbey, but no castle; at London there was a castle and no abbey; and at Norwich, which had both an abbey and a castle in Norman times, neither was primitive, and the town appears to have originally consisted of hamlets of fishermen and traders, for whom Tombland* was the centre of what was known as the English borough; the French burgesses were settled at Mancroft beneath the castle, and the Abbot and his dependents formed another group. The chief problems of municipal history are concerned with the life of the complex towns where distinct groups combined together into one town, with its own privileges and responsibilities. But there are also many cases where we have the nucleus of a town which never attained any great prosperity. Castle Rising and Binham Abbey, each with its market cross, may be regarded rather as the nucleus of a populous place than as a town. Tattershall Castle in Lincolnshire, with its elaborate moats and brick keep, is a very late example of such a castle which remained with few residents round it. At Castle Acre, William of Warrenne not only reared his castle, but planted a Cluniac priory

* Hudson, *How the City of Norwich grew into Shape* (1896), 29.



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but it never attained such proportions as his other foundation at Lewes. When we thus take account of the influence of founders and patrons, we see links of connection between places which are far apart, and find evidence of influence at which we should not be ready to guess. David, Earl of Huntingdon, was also King of Scotland, and it is no accident that the abbey he founded at Kelso should have the western transept which is characteristic of the great churches of the Fen Country—Ramsey and Ely and Bury.

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II.—THE TOWN AS AN ORGANISED AND SELF-CENTRED UNIT

THE process by which these groups and isolated individuals came to cohere into an organism with a life of its own and a policy of its own had gone some way at the Norman Conquest, and continued all through the Middle Ages. The steps in particular places are marked by the charters which the inhabitants of this or that place received from the King or the manorial lord. But there are three principles of cohesion which we can distinguish, and which left their mark in the institutions of each town. There were *obligations*, especially the fiscal obligations of contributing to the revenue of the Crown; there was the privilege of exercising coercive authority by levying rates, and criminal jurisdiction, which was conferred on local authority; and there was the principle of voluntary association for common objects, which lies at the root of the formation of *gilds*. These three strands are distinct, but they were gradually combined in practice by the local authority, which undertook the obligations towards the King, and exercised from time to time a measure of coercive authority through the gilds.

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It appears that originally local authority was exercised by those who had possession of the *land* on which a town was situated, and a great revolution in town life can be dimly traced in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the landless men secured a share in the discharge of local obligations and the exercise of local authority. The success of this revolution at one centre or another seems to be marked by the recognition of a Mayor* as the chief executive authority.

The possession of land has gradually ceased to be the basis of local authority, but the rural element in town life has survived in many ways, and in some places it continued to be of supreme importance for centuries. The lord of a manor is not to be thought of as a mere autocrat; the tenants had rights of their own, and the Courts Leet which governed Manchester were the survival of manorial institutions. The towns were often dependent on their own arable fields for their own supply of corn, and the pasture rights of the freeman of the borough were carefully stinted in the common interest. It need be no matter of surprise that we have in Cambridge an excellent example of the thirteenth-century manor-house in Pythagoras Hall, or that we have records of the Cambridge fields, and an eighteenth-century picture of them as divided by balks like other

* In Norwich in 1404. Hudson, *How Norwich Grew*, 65.

open fields; town mills* are also relics which come down from very early times. The milling rights of abbeys were a cause of conflict with the townsmen both at Shrewsbury† and St. Albans.‡ It appears that it was because Cambridge was well supplied with means of subsistence that it was marked out as a suitable place for scholars to settle. At the same time, while we recognise the importance of land and neighbourliness as an element in civic organisation and cohesion, we must not overrate it as essential. Organisation sometimes brought together for purposes of jurisdiction associations or groups that were not closely connected, as in the combined authority of the Cinque Ports§ or the outlying parts which were governed together in the town of Much Wenlock.‖

I. The Ground Plan.—There is no more important monument of the history of any town than is given by the ground plan. There is great difficulty in altering the main lines of traffic; houses may be replaced, but they are likely to occupy the old sites. Though a deliberate effort was made to alter the plan of London after the

* Water mills had to be placed at points where there was a rush of water and were not always contiguous to a town.

† Owen and Blakeway, *Shrewsbury*, i. 129, 130.

‡ *Growth of English Industry* (1890), i. 359 and *n*.

§ The Cinque Ports sent bailiffs to superintend the Herring Fair (Blomefield, xi. 346).

‖ R. W. Eyton, *Antiquities of Shropshire*, iii. 271.

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Great Fire, and schemes for doing so were
pounded by Sir John Evelyn and Sir Christo
Wren, it may be said that little or nothing
of it, and that the ground plan of London
the fire reproduced that of medieval Lon
The ground plans of Cambridge and Lincoln
Winchester are at least suggestive of
Roman origin. In other cases the plan re
what was found convenient in the ori
nucleus, as London Street and the wind r
the castle hill at Norwich.* Sometimes a
cipal street, or the frontage of houses which
access to the river or sea, follows the line of
waterway or the coast,† and we can also ide
extensions which have taken place at diffe
dates, and thus have some clear idea as to
growth of suburbs and residential quar
Where the regularity of the streets or ho
shows that the town has been laid out on a
liberate plan, there is less evidence as to
conditions, but there is some interest about
type which the founders appear to have kep
view.

1. *The Market-Place.*—The market-place is
most characteristic feature of the ground pla
an English town; it was, generally speaking,

* Burnstead. A similar feature is noticeable in several t
in Normandy.

† Summer Street in Boston

centre from which and to which all the currents of town life circulated. The market-place was originally the spot to which weekly supplies, such as eggs, butter, and cheese, were brought, as well as butchers' meat. Facilities for the purchase of such supplies did not require a great deal of space. It is astonishing to see how tightly market women, each with their baskets, can be packed in some of the French markets to-day—as, for instance, at Le Mans—and the original markets of several towns were curiously small, as at Rugby, Grantham, or Downham Market.

The fairs, at which articles of distant trade were sold, appear to have been organised on a different scheme. The booths or stalls have an ancient lineage. The Boldon Book (A.D. 1183) specifies the "putting up of eighteen booths at the fairs of St. Cuthbert" as one of the customary duties of the villains of Aucklandshire, and Seebohm* connects this service with the advice in regard to the holding of festivities in honour of the martyrs which was given by Gregory the Great and has been preserved by Bede. When Abbot Martin (1133-1155) transferred the town of Peterborough from the east of the abbey to the west, he also transposed the market to a new position and laid it out on lines which left ample room for the erection of stalls. In the following century, when

* Seebohm, *English Village Community*, 71.

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distant trade appears to have had a great impetus in consequence of the Crusades, there were many spacious market-places in the Eastern Counties laid out, as at Yarmouth, Norwich, Bury, Cambridge, and Lynn, and business is still carried on in them at temporary stalls. Spacious markets have been secured in other cases, not by the laying out of a market-square, but by building the town with a very wide street. Northallerton and Marlborough are cases in point. It seems to have been a frequent habit to utilise the sides of streets for additional market accommodation, and we read of special markets for special goods occupying the streets of Oxford* in the fourteenth century. A very similar state of affairs seems to have existed in Edinburgh† in the eighteenth century.

2. *Stalls and Encroachments.*—The practice of erecting stalls in a market-place resulted in the formation of rows appropriated to particular trades, and eventually gave rise to extraordinary encroachments on the market-place. When the salesman was allowed to erect a more or less permanent stall, instead of being content with a structure which was removed after each market day, a first step was taken to filling up the vacant space with permanent buildings. These shops, with dwelling-places above, are entirely different

* Boase, *Oxford*, 57.
† Maitland, *History of Edinburgh*, 9.

in type to the passage and yard houses which had been practically universal; the encroachments had no backyards of any kind, and were either excrescences on some public building or narrow barracks separated from each other by lanes. Such a street ran through the middle of Cambridge market-place before 1843, when it was swept away by a fire, and the market-place at Ludlow in Shropshire is almost entirely occupied by such encroachments. There are signs of encroachments in a very large number of market-places; the butchers' shops are often permanent when the rest of the market is still vacant for the erection of stalls.

Butchers' shops often illustrate another form of encroachment by which houses have extended themselves beyond the line of the street. The shop-front of the old butcher's shop is often retained, with a shutter which folds down as a counter and another which is raised up when the shop is open and gives some protection from the weather.* The rights of the butchers in York† who had permanent shops in the shambles were carefully distinguished from those of the country butchers who frequented the Thursday market; the shambles form a regular street at Kendal, and somewhat pretentious buildings were erected for

* As in Butcher Row, Shrewsbury.

† Drake, *Eboracum*, 325.

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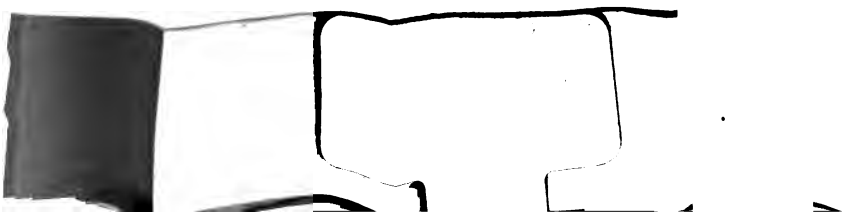
them in the eighteenth century at Ipswich and at High Wycombe. We can frequently see that wooden abutments have been thrown out, so that the house ceases to encroach on the old line of the street and to narrow the thoroughfare.

3. *Passages.*—The private houses erected during this great period of medieval town building were so often of the passage or yard type as to give English towns a system of arrangement which does not seem to have been discarded till the seventeenth or eighteenth century. Each house had its gable on the frontage, and access was given to the back of the house by means of a passage or a yard. Such passages were apparently at first part of the house, and private, but circumstances arose under which the public demanded a right to use them. In London this demand seems to have been raised by those who found they were shut out from the river, and there came to be a practice of treating these passages as public thoroughfares. The rows at Yarmouth and the closes in Edinburgh are characteristic examples which help to give the ground plans something of the appearance of a gridiron.

4. *Town Planting.*—The vigour of town life in the thirteenth century, which was probably due to the impulse given by the Crusades, was not only shown by the development and extension of old towns but by the planting of new ones. King



Edward I. founded many bastides* or *villes franches* in the south of France, and he also built towns which might serve as ports for weavers' trades at Kingston-upon-Hull and King's Lynn. His example was followed by Bishop Poore, who transplanted his cathedral city bodily from Old Sarum to Salisbury; while the Bishop of St. Andrews laid out the town in close proximity to his abbey, and imported townsmen from Berwick† who were accustomed to the institutions of town life. When so much attention was being given to the planting and transplanting of towns, it cannot be a matter of surprise that we should find evidence of the work of surveyors and definite schemes of town planning. The French examples give much more sign of deliberate laying out than any of the towns in England; Carcassonne presents one type and Montpazier‡ another, to which Salisbury and St. Andrews only give distant approximations. If the convenience of the site no longer determined the arrangements of the streets, it was of sufficient importance to affect the application of a plan.

II. PUBLIC BUILDINGS.—Many interesting monuments of town life in the Middle Ages survive in

* Viollet le Duc, *Dictionnaire*; A. C. Seimbres, *Essai sur Villes*, 43, 61.

† Scott, *Berwick*, 6.

‡ Turner and Parker, *Domestic Architecture*, ii., illustration opposite p. 154.

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ancient buildings in one town or another. But whereas we are probably justified in taking the expansion of areas and the foundation of new towns in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries as evidence of general prosperity, the striking public buildings which remain are mostly of the fifteenth century; and there is ample evidence that the pestilence which swept through the country in the middle of the fourteenth century struck a disastrous blow at many of the towns,* and that they showed very little sign of recovery till the reign of Elizabeth. The buildings which remain are evidence of the wealth of certain trades —notably the cloth trades—and of special callings —notably the wholesale dealers†—rather than of the prosperity of the community. Lavenham as it stands to-day is a remarkable monument of a fifteenth-century centre of the cloth trade, with the magnificent church which was built by the Springs, with its market cross, its guildhall, and its moot-hall, which was recently rescued from transportation. We must remember, too, that the rivalry between neighbouring towns‡—*e.g.*, between Boston and Lincoln—was very strong,

* Bateson, *Records of the Borough of Leicester*, ii., p. lxiv.

† Some of the halls of gilds were preserved after the Dissolution, and used for municipal purposes, as at Boston (P. Thompson, *Boston*, p. 233) and Coventry.

‡ The Bishop of Rodez excommunicated all who should build on Alphonso of Poitiers' new site at Rovergne (Turner and Parker, *op. cit.*, ii. 169).

and that the civic patriotism of public-spirited individuals or of gilds took the form of adding to the dignity and magnificence of their own town.

1. *Town Halls.*—Among town halls, that of Much Wenlock has a unique interest, because it served, and still serves, for several distinct purposes, and testifies to the different functions for which town halls were built; in many towns one or other of these functions was provided for in a separate building, but at Much Wenlock they are concentrated together. The town hall of Much Wenlock was erected late in the fourteenth or early in the fifteenth century, and enlarged in 1577; it exemplifies the lines of a medieval building, while it was beautified and refurnished in later times. The ground floor is an arcade with open pillars, one of which served as a whipping-post; the open space is still used as a shelter for the women who sell butter and eggs; at one end of the building is a stone prison, and at the other end a staircase which leads to the Hall where the Mayor holds his court, and to the Mayor's Parlour. This town hall serves both for the market purposes, which we shall consider later, and for police administration. It is also interesting to notice that the ground plan of the building closely resembles the house of the Podestá at Orvieto, and that we need have no hesitation in regarding

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this English house as derived from some example in southern lands; the town hall at Montpazier appears to present very similar features.

There are several medieval town halls in different parts of England, where provision is made for the administration of justice and the imposition of punishment. Till fifty years ago, the old prison with the court above was still in use at Great Yarmouth, and that at Totnes is used by the coroner. There is a disused town hall with a court above and a prison below at Winchelsea; and one that was very similar to that at Yarmouth existed at Ipswich. The guildhall at Norwich,* which was built by forced labour from 1407 onwards on the site of the Old Tolbooth, served as the prison where Bilney was confined. These buildings sometimes contain instruments of punishment: there is a tumbril at Much Wenlock, and stocks in the little brick town hall at Brading, and a considerable assortment of means of inflicting penalties at Rye. In some cases the prisoners were confined in other buildings than the town hall, and it was found convenient to use a gate house for the purpose; the gate on the bridge at Bedford is commonly believed to have been the place where John Bunyan was confined.

The most striking fifteenth-century town halls, however, seem to have been built as official

* Blomefield, 8vo., iv. 228.

residences for civic authority, and with a view to the exercise of corporate hospitality. The main features are the hall and the parlour, which are comparable to the halls in the country houses of the nobility, or in the colleges at Oxford and Cambridge or the Inns of Court. Such are the town halls at York and at Exeter; the beautiful timbered house at Hereford, which is now used as a bank, was built for civic purposes. A humbler example is the town hall at Leicester, though it has a special interest of its own from the tradition that connects it with a performance of Shakespeare's *Richard III.*, in which Shakespeare himself appeared.*

2. *Market Crosses.*—It is by no means easy to decide what may have been the origin and function of the market cross; it has been derived from a boundary stone, and crosses were used to mark the boundaries and the centre of the abbey jurisdiction at Cirencester; but they do not seem to have had much to do with the trade of the town. There is more reason to regard them as analogous to the *Rolande* in Germany, which are symbols of imperial or royal authority, and especially authority to collect tolls. They certainly have this character in Scotland to a remarkable extent, where public proclamations are made and public notices are displayed; but there is little evidence

* F. F. Johnson, *Glimpses of Ancient Leicester*, 184.

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that they served such purposes in England (where the bellman went his rounds), though during the Commonwealth they were appointed as the places at which banns were to be proclaimed.* It is not clear that they were generally used for the collection of tolls or that no tolls were levied where there was no market cross. There were in some places other buildings for authoritative weighing and the collection of dues. The thirteenth-century toll-house at Great Yarmouth still exists. There was an old tolbooth at Norwich in the fifteenth century, and there is a tolsey at Burford; we read of authorities who had charge of the large and of the small beam in London, and the trone was needed for charges in connection with the wool trade. There are so many markets where there is no cross that it is not easy to specify the precise link between this symbol and the actual conduct of trade.

The difference in the number of market crosses between such counties as Somerset and Gloucester seems to show that their original purpose was forgotten and that the erection of a cross had become largely a matter of fashion. Many of the fourteenth and fifteenth century crosses are simply to be regarded as dignified ornaments in the town; in some cases, as at Lavenham, there is a simple shaft raised upon steps with a cross at the top,

* Pooley, *Crosses of Gloucestershire*, 88.

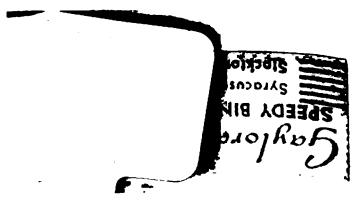
and there is nothing to distinguish it from the churchyard crosses which are found in so many villages; but in other places they are much elaborated. The market cross at Banbury and at Leighton Buzzard were great objects of pride;* they were very similar to the series of Eleanor crosses.† The cross in Cheapside was of a similar type, as well as that at Winchester. When these crosses were built with a wide base, they provided a shelter for the women who sat at them with baskets of butter and eggs. Such are the poultry cross at Salisbury, the cross at Chichester, and that at Shepton Mallet in Somerset, and this object of providing a market shelter was a very marked feature in many of the market crosses. There was a similar cross at Glastonbury, and simpler stone buildings which served this purpose were erected at Cheddar and at Sherborne.

8. *Conduits.*—Many of the towns were able to obtain their water supplies from a river, or by means of wells, but they became increasingly dependent on a better supply, which was conveyed to a conduit. Bishop Beckington provided such a supply at Wells; and there was also a conduit in close proximity to the cross at Cheapside, and at Glastonbury,‡ and they were com-

* "On the Cross at Leighton Buzzard" (Britton, *Beauties*, 36).

† C. A. Markham, *Stone Crosses of the County of Northampton*, 4 and 8.

‡ Hearne and Byrne, *Antiquities of Great Britain*, ii., pl. 16.



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bined together at Sherborne and Linlithgow. When the old octagonal butter cross at Shrewsbury was taken down in 1705 a cistern for a water supply was erected in its place.* The monasteries were in the habit of bringing a supply of water to the cloisters,† and Henry VIII. was mindful of the requirements of the students for whom Trinity College was founded; and it is satisfactory to feel that the same attempts were made in medieval times to provide for the townsmen. In this connection it may be worth while to point out that even if we have no examples of medieval protection against the dangers of fire, the firehooks which Elizabeth required to be adopted in every parish were probably in customary use before her time at well-appointed places.

4. *Warehouses.*—The devastation caused by the Fire of London was so complete that it is only here and there in provincial towns that we come across the provision which was made for their requirements by fifteenth-century trading companies. There are interesting monuments of the Staples at Calais, of the Merchant Adventurers at Middelburg, and of the Scottish Staple at Veere. The most complete is probably the House of the Merchant Adventurers at York, and we see there that ample warehouse accommodation was re-

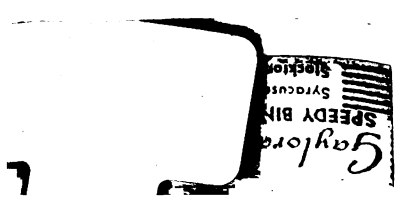
* Phillips, *Shrewsbury*, i. 135.

† Willis, *The Monastery of Christ Church in Canterbury*, chap. x.

despite the ascription to the soil which bound so many villains, and the local ties of proprietors and others, were habituated to constant movement in a way we are apt to forget. The dating of charters and documents shows how habitually the King and his Court were on tour, and the households of great men were also migratory. Alien merchants were free to travel about in England from fair to fair, while they appear to have been rigidly excluded in Scotland, and Chaucer's *Tales* give us a picture of the pilgrimages which were undertaken apart from business altogether. The monasteries exercised a great deal of hospitality in their most flourishing days, but provision was also made for the passing stranger in inns, many of which survive. The yard house lent itself readily to serve this purpose, and the fourteenth or fifteenth century type of inn has been preserved in the Red Lion at Banbury, where the corn market is still held, and we get some idea of the crowded conditions* under which our forefathers were accustomed to live and work. There are other examples in the Rose and Crown at Wisbech, though the magnificent cellarage† is no part of the original house; in the New Inn at Gloucester; and in the Rose and Crown at Sudbury, which

* A lurid picture of the discomforts to which they submitted is given by Sir H. Maxwell in his *Edinburgh*.

† It was probably a means of conveying goods from the road to the castle.



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Dickens has immortalised as the scene of the quarrel between the rival editors at Eatanswill. In regard to each of these houses, there are many associations such as have been summed up by the Saracen's Head at Southwell.

6. *Devastation.*—It is sad to feel how many of the monuments of medieval municipal life have been swept away in quite recent times; our towns would at all events have been much more picturesque if they had been retained. It is pitiful to contrast the Glastonbury market as it appeared in 1808,* including cross and conduit, with its present condition, but the changes were not always made merely recklessly and without reason. There doubtless have been cases of deliberate destruction, where reformers and puritans set themselves to "slight" objects of superstition, or where Cromwell's soldiers allowed themselves to "spite" those who opposed them.† But these cases may be regarded as exceptional, and the wholesale destruction which has gone on cannot be attributed to such motives. The reasons may have been sufficient or not, but some consideration had to be given to the exigencies and conveniences of traffic. Thoroughfares which were amply sufficient for the conveyance of goods in the Middle Ages were quite insufficient for the more frequent intercourse that

* Pooley, *Crosses of Somerset*, 17.

† On the cross at Abingdon, destroyed in 1644, see Britton, *Beauties of England and Wales*, i. 168.

had sprung up in coaching days; the roads and bridges that were wide enough for pack-horses were of little use for wheeled vehicles. The old bridge at Nottingham over the Trent* had to be widened more than once, and there are comparatively few of the old stone bridges which have been left unaltered. We can sympathise with such concessions to practical convenience, but when the old bridge was destroyed altogether and a new one substituted, as at Bedford, it is more difficult to be reconciled to the loss. When it is practicable there is much to be said for removing some ancient buildings to new surroundings, as was done with Temple Bar, but in many cases this can scarcely be done. Mr. Lister removed many of the old houses of Halifax and had them erected in his park, but the Cloth Hall, which was a unique structure, was so huge that it could not be treated in this way.†

* It was originally about 12 feet wide (Tarbotton, *History of Old Trent Bridge*, 24).

† The high cross of Cirencester has been moved to Oakley Park and the high cross of Bristol was removed to the grounds of Sir R. C. Hoare in Wiltshire (Britton, *Antiquities*, i. 20).

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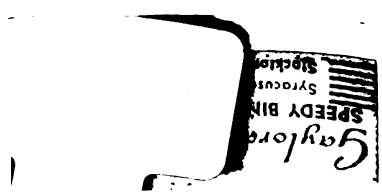
III.—THE TOWN AS AFFECTED BY THE NATIONAL LIFE

THERE is a continuity in the life of every town, and there seems to be something arbitrary about any attempt to draw a hard-and-fast line at any date, and mark out the medieval from the modern. At the same time, the conditions of town life and the problems to which they gave rise have been very different in early ages from those which have had to be considered later, and for convenience of study it is desirable to draw a line somewhere. The monuments of municipal life seem to fall apart, according as they are Gothic or show the influence of the Renaissance,* and this classification is convenient in many ways, as it synchronises with great changes in the character of municipal institutions and buildings. After the Reformation municipal institutions were more frankly secular and were less closely associated with ecclesiastical organisation; and there is much less of a com-

* The beautiful screen of King's Chapel at Cambridge tells its own date, as it carries the initials H.R. and A.R. intertwined in a true lover's knot, and Anne Boleyn had but a short period as Queen; the earliest stone building in Cambridge which shows Italian influence is the Gate of Honour at Caius, erected half a century later.

munity spirit in the philanthropic and other institutions and much more opportunity for the individual to lead his own life in his own way. This is noticeable both in the trading companies and in such charities as schools or hospitals. This division is convenient, too, because with Philip and Mary the long period of the decay of corporate towns appears to have come to an end, and there was a very general revival of municipal life in the early part of the seventeenth century. But the whole character of the towns, and their policy and aims, underwent an extraordinary change. In the Middle Ages they had been *self-centred*, each pursuing a policy of its own, and with little opportunity of expansion; the possibilities of growth were limited by the area of food supply. But in modern times each town has come to aim at *playing a part in the life of the realm;* it has been able to make the most of its special advantages, and has had opportunities of sharing in expansion as the commerce of the nation extended to new areas. The towns came under national control in many matters which they had hitherto regulated themselves, and they also partook of the prosperity which was being carefully fostered by the Crown and Parliament. These measures were not always well devised as means to the end in view, and the attempts to carry them out caused much inconvenience and irritation; but on the whole the



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towns prospered which allowed themselves to fall in with the national policy, especially in regard to the reception of aliens.

I. Renaissance Buildings.

1. *Market-Places.*—Great pains were taken during the Elizabethan period with the regulation and control of the markets; the principle which it was desired to enforce was no longer that the town should be well supplied from its own neighbourhood, and that the forestallers and regraters should be discouraged, but that the middlemen who distributed the food supply of the realm should have their opportunity, though a preference was still given to local consumers. The clerk of the market was an important officer. He had been originally concerned with purveyance for the royal household, but he came to have a general supervision over weights and measures and market transactions. This part of his work was dissociated from the Court under Charles I., and the responsibility was cast upon the Mayor, whose business it was to see that local needs were cared for, while he was also responsible for noting the stocks of corn and seeing that there was no injurious speculation in holding them back. The outward and visible sign which has been perpetuated is the bell-turret, which is very commonly found in the town halls or near the

markets.* In the continental towns it was common enough to have a bell-tower and to summon the citizens by a tocsin, and this feature appears in the Scottish town halls; but in medieval England the towns seem to have relied on the bells of some church for public summons or for the curfew, and the erection of bell-turrets for market regulation was a new departure.

The chief change which took place at this time in the market-places was one which can hardly be associated with any political organisation; but it is at least intelligible that in an age in which, as Harrison reminds us, there was a greatly developed increase of domestic comfort, there should be attempts to provide shelter against the weather; these were very general in England, and curiously absent in Scotland. In many cases the market cross was added to, so as to provide shelter from the weather, especially by making a penthouse round the cross. This was done at Sherborne in stone, and there were wooden crosses of the same at Brackley and Cranborne, and at Cambridge; an elaborate cross of this kind was given to Ipswich, and one may still be seen at Mildenhall. This seems to have been a very common type, and to have been incorporated in the large municipal buildings at Farnham and Tenby and Bath.

* Compare the market regulations for York in 1550 (Drake, *Eboracum*, 218).

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There was some tendency to erect, not merely a roof, but a chamber over the market cross; at North Walsham and Wymondham these rooms appear to have been originally used for purposes of storage. A still more curious development of the cross occurred when this elaborated structure was replaced by a building in stone or brick; such was the high cross at Leicester, and the market crosses at York and at Wakefield, or the butter crosses at Burwell near Louth, and at Barnard Castle. Still more extensive is the elaboration of accommodation at the cross at Lynn, while in other places large market-houses or shelters were erected which were quite independent of the cross; there is such a chepyng at Kingsbridge and at Chipping Camden and the market-house* at St. Albans.

2. *The Corn Trade.*—One great feature of Elizabethan England was the improvement of local communication and the development of a corn trade both for the better distribution of the food supply of the realm and for export. The new opportunities of working for a market, instead of prosecuting subsistence farming, gave an extraordinary impulse to agriculture in many districts, especially in those which had facilities for communication by water. There were some towns, like Farnham, which became centres at which

* Britton, *Beauties*, vii. 107.

supplies for the London demand were collected; they developed a great trade in corn, and corn exchanges mark the growth of the trade at Shrewsbury, where the open arcade of the beautiful market-house succeeded houses* which had been built for this purpose in 1567. While the corn trade was important to some towns from the part they took in it, it was of general importance because it helped to remove a barrier to progress.† The development of a town was no longer confined, since the food supply could be drawn from the realm at large, and was not derived from the neighbouring fields. London was the city which took advantage of this opportunity of expansion, and the efforts to confine its population within manageable proportions ceased with Elizabeth and Charles, though its growth continued to be an object of jealousy to outports and of anxiety to Petty.

Another of the necessaries of life in which internal trade sprang up, so that local resources ceased to be of such importance, was the supply of fuel. London became dependent on Newcastle for sea coal in the seventeenth century, but the inland coalfields were not developed till an example of navigation was set by the cutting of the Bridgewater Canal.

* Phillips, *Shrewsbury*, i. 135.

† There was an abundant supply in the realm, as England only ceased to be an exporting country and became an importing country in the period from 1770 to 1790.

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3. *The Cloth Trade.*—The cloth trade was the great export trade of the realm, and much pains was taken by the Government to extend it by obtaining access to new markets, and by promoting improvements, such as the diffusion of the art of spinning. There are many monuments which show how particular districts shared in this industrial development; such as the yarn market at Dunster, which closely resembles a butter cross; and the cloth halls, where the domestic weavers disposed of their goods at Halifax. The upper part of the market hall was used as a market for Welsh flannels by the drapers of Shrewsbury.*

Attempts to improve this trade were made by the introduction of Walloons and other foreign aliens, who were settled in the Strangers' Houses at Stamford and Norwich, and carried on their callings in the mill at Colchester, or did their weaving in factories, one of which survives at Dedham.

4. *Town Halls.*—Apart from the developments of trade and its differentiation to which the monuments testify, there seems to have been an increased sense of dignity, and there was much activity in the building of town halls. The Mayors were more and more the agents of royal administration, both in attempts to provide employment and to maintain order in the community. James I. appears to have been personally interested in the

* Phillips, *Shrewsbury*, i. 135.

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